

## Limonada

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The last time I made lemonade was when my great-grandpa was alive  
His face weathered with experience and lessons traced through  
His veins of life as an American  
Held all models of pride in his clear, wise expression

He wanted to know how I was doing, why I was making lemonade  
What was I adding  
I told him I was adding a bit of both. Lemons and strawberries  
Little bit of ice because summers in L.A. were scorching

And him just saying, that's good, was enough for me to know  
just making lemonade I was making him proud

And then he left me to do the rest of the work

I've never confronted my imposter until my great-grandpa passed away  
Because then it was easier to confront in his empty room  
Showing me where I couldn't show up for myself in school  
Like how I couldn't show up for him in his years of relishing in his  
accomplishments of his American Dream  
The rest of us had proved our worth, but I hadn't  
Not yet, not while dredging through storms of imposter syndrome  
And feelings of anxiety from his loss  
So strange rays of emotions from grief took me away

Buried me somewhere in seeds of shame  
Too dry to root from the cemented dirt  
After being shoveled into a grueling experience of  
First generation problems

First generation problems  
Taste like champagne problems to others who know

Where their language comes from in their vocals  
Where their pride is shown in family photos  
With photos published on school platforms of people so proud  
to rep what they had

Sinking their teeth through the juicy flesh of the fruits from their labor  
Something bountiful, baskets of things first-gen students shy away from  
From people who knew their worth in themselves  
Who share their experiences without a breath taken away

While I sit here, us first gens on our own benches  
Winded by everything that twists us inside  
that makes us feel less of our flesh and bones  
And more of the mirage I promised in applications  
Until the dust of euphoria settles into the dark corners I recede into  
Now your eyes no longer see what being in college meant to me

Because we hear our insecurities about validity  
Was this the American Dream my family dreamt for me?  
Do I have dreams for me?  
Or do these dreams of imposters in my mirrors mean  
I have to shrink away  
From the place I always thought was where I was meant to be?

Do I bring my roots from home and lay them here?  
Do I speak in my own tongue to share other folds  
waiting to be unveiled about the beauty in our world's diversity?  
Do I share with others my struggles to find strength in unity  
So we can make the world better tomorrow in our numbers  
with empathy?

Do I-?

Is a question that hangs where a first gen once sat  
In their class learning Statistics  
Before they submitted "Withdrawal," on their Monday schedule

While other students like me fantasized a transcript in our heads

“I can’t do this anymore, Mom.”

“I can take a gap year and get right back to it.”

“I can’t go back, I’m not good enough to learn with those other people.”

I-

All the Is I ever said hung like a chain of fungi around my roots  
That didn’t spring into the open space  
above the dirt while rings of insecurities rang through my ears  
With rings of every reason why I wanted to quit  
And burn everything off and walk away  
To uproot myself and be placed as weeds on the headstone with my great-  
grandpa’s photo  
And take comfort with his memory, let these dreams shrivel in peace.

But grandpa told me I was good

And every time I would see myself as my own imposter  
in the reflection of his headstone, he’d be the mirror  
of what I wasn’t

I wasn’t an imposter in the house  
with the broken Spanish and the outstanding grades  
I was his great-granddaughter, the prodigy for our familia  
Who spoke broken but more fluent Spanish  
with good grades because I chose myself  
over these expectations of what made an American Dream

The same way my great-grandpa had done for us  
Laid every brick, no matter how crooked or chipped  
No matter the persecution by others of what made an American  
Because in his eyes, my grandpa was no imposter  
He wasn’t bound to regrets of who he became  
As he built the home base for us in his new homeland  
Because in every scrap of cement

he saw me crafting my own life of beautiful dreams  
In every seedling he planted in the pots of his garden  
he saw an imposter-less child  
Weaving thornless roses through  
the earth in seedlings meant for more

So I made my own dream like I made my own pot  
Crafted from clay broken in with cracks and dust  
From those days I wanted to take it all away  
to get rid of these imposter pangs  
I churned my own soil from beds of mud and cracked earth  
From where my family laid the foundation for us  
So we could have as much as the people who didn't look like us

I laid my roots and they drowned in rain  
Where my grief from grandpa was suffocating  
And those roots laid so low in the soil  
Because I wasn't as strong before as I am today  
Until I remembered him  
When he said what I was doing was good enough  
Something as simple as making lemonade was good enough  
It would make going through college good enough  
although not simple enough  
And I remembered that he grew up and grew old  
And that was good enough for him  
And I remembered he wanted me to grow up and grow old  
In the way that was good enough for me

So I grow and I grow until I'm bursting out of my own pot  
And I will grow and grow until my stems extend and enclose  
Around others who will see everything I want them to see

To see me as a proud woman of color  
Who writes with her wit and soul for the world  
And shares stories of finding how to make things sweet again  
After sucking on sour fruits of poor labor

From wicked droughts of my own self destructing thoughts  
Because I'm laying the seeds of who I am meant to be

And I'll reach through these grapevines on the wall  
that used to separate me from everyone else in the class  
Take these seedlings through their lifespans  
until they are ready for reincarnation  
As fruits of my labor  
I'll make my stems thrush into branches of victories  
So they'll knot in thick ropes of the security in my identity  
And lay them over as a canopy  
For these seeds to root through their shells

For when they blossom, they hang heavy as ripe lemons  
And we'll catch them when they drop onto the grass  
Because when life gives you lemons, you make lemonade